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June 17, 2006

Dear Veterans:

As you may know, last year I obtained a commitment from the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Jim Nicholson, to restudy the Fort Wayne veterans' hospital and the location of inpatient beds at the hospital. This was a major victory in our battle for maintaining inpatient care in Fort Wayne. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is now working on an official statement of work that will describe the study as it is to be bid on by various independent contractors.

I have been in contact with the VA regarding my specific recommendations for the statement of work to ensure that it accurately and objectively studies the demand for inpatient care and the full range of options that might be considered to respond to that demand. You may recall that my office determined that the original CARES decision was based on faulty data that miscalculated the inpatient demand at the Fort Wayne hospital by 88 percent over the next decade. I want to ensure that the new, independent study is accurate and comprehensive in nature to ensure that any future decisions are based on the best information and analysis.

Before the VA completes the statement of work, I am inviting veterans to submit their recommendations for the statement of work to my office so that I can forward them to the VA. The VA has assured me it will consider all recommendations submitted by veterans in northeast Indiana.

In light of that commitment, I would appreciate your thoughtful, objective input to help ensure that the study accurately and comprehensively researches and analyzes all of the data and information necessary to make a decision that is in the best interest of veterans in northeast Indiana. The VA will be considering how to maintain or improve veterans' access to care and quality of care while balancing cost-effectiveness. So, please limit your recommendations to specific questions to be answered or research to be done that will be most helpful in ensuring that these issues are thoroughly and objectively addressed. General opinions about VA health care or the CARES decision will not be helpful for the purposes of this study. You may wish to use the following list of questions as a starting point for considering what factors or issues you believe must be studied or considered by the independent contractor:

- What data is necessary to assess the impact and costs of transferring greater numbers of patients to Indianapolis? Examples of such data might be lodging and travel costs for patients and relatives, time at work lost due to travel, the possibility that more patients will skip inpatient treatment and utilize emergency room care at community hospitals, etc. What other factors should be considered?
- What information is needed to determine the demand for certain outpatient specialty treatments and procedures? What outpatient care is being requested now that should be studied as a possibility for expansion of care, especially in light of the type of injuries being incurred in the War on Terror?
- What data is necessary to obtain the true inpatient demand in northeast Indiana? For example, all patients, regardless of whether they started in Fort Wayne and transferred to Indianapolis or initially received treatment in Indianapolis or another hospital, should be counted in inpatient calculations and projections for the Fort Wayne facility. What other factors should be considered to ensure the true inpatient demand is calculated?
- What existing concerns are there related to access to care and quality of care that should be considered for improvement in any reconfiguration of the Fort Wayne hospital?
- What opportunities for unique partnerships with local hospitals should be studied? What assets exist in the community that might be considered as an opportunity for partnership with the VA?

Thank you for supporting inpatient care at the Fort Wayne hospital. I believe the new study will help us make the case for a better outcome than the CARES decision originally provided.

Because all mail sent to the U.S. Capitol is searched and irradiated, which delays it significantly, please fax all comments and recommendations to my Washington, D.C., office by close of business June 26, at (202) 225-3479. I look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,



Mark Souder  
Member of Congress